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ABSTRACT

The author briefly justifies work on a book entitled "Career Education for Gifted and Talented Students" and comments on four problems in the delivery of effective career education to the gifted and talented. Listed among reasons for choosing the book's topic is that career education is for all individuals, including the gifted and talented. Sections are given to the following areas: career decision making problems (such as lack of interest in nonacademic activities); talent development problems (such as the failure to develop as a whole person because of concentration on a particular talent area); work experience problems (such as finding talented individuals in the community for whom gifted and talented students could work); and career selection problems (such as the assumption that gifted and talented individuals should use their gifts and talents in the world of paid employment). (SB)

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CAREER EDUCATION FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED PERSONS

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Introduction

It has been almost two years since Jean Hebeler and I collaborated in writing and editing a set of papers in a book entitled Career Education for Gifted and Talented Students. I have no good idea of the number of copies that have been distributed. My impression is that it is not on the "best seller" list. At the same time, I have heard reports that several thousand copies have been sold.

The most common question I receive concerning that book is usually stated in the form of "Why in the world did you choose to write a book on that topic?" The question used to amuse me, and I would usually respond with some answer which, in effect, said that I did the book in order to emphasize the fact that career education was for more than vocational education students. I don't say that anymore for two reasons. First, I have ceased to be amused by the question and am now somewhat angered when I hear it. Second, as I have thought more about career education for gifted and talented persons, it has become increasingly obvious that some such persons are in vocational education - thus making my original answer patently inappropriate.

The conversion of "career education" from an idea to a full-blown concept is still in process. However, even two years ago, certain basic elements in the career education concept were clearly in place - elements that

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served as ample justification for a book on that topic. Included among those conceptual elements were the following:

1. Career education is for all persons (including the gifted and talented).

2. Career education seeks to: (a) help all individuals understand and capitalize on relationships between education and work; and (b) make work a more meaningful part of the total lifestyle of all persons.

3. Career education is committed to combatting race, sex, and cultural barriers to full freedom of career choices for all persons.

4. Career education stresses both paid and unpaid work in its conceptual efforts. Unpaid work includes the work of the volunteer and work in which persons engage in productive use of leisure time.

Such elements clearly pointed to the appropriateness of considering the topic of career education for gifted and talented persons. Each, however, was small in comparison to the appropriateness our definition of "work" held for gifted and talented persons. The definition in the book Jean Hebeler and I did was, with some slight modification, the same definition I am currently using. The definition is:

> "WORK" is conscious effort, other than activities whose primary purpose is either coping or relaxation, aimed at producing benefits for oneself and/or for oneself and others.

That definition, in addition to making clear the fact that we include unpaid work as well as the world of paid employment in our considerations, hopefully also makes clear that we are talking about the basic human need for all human beings to do - to achieve - to accomplish things that will allow the individual to gain greater insight into both who she or he is and why she or he exists. It is a very humanistic need - the need we all have to feel that someone needs ME for something - that it does make a difference that I exist - that, because I exist, the world is

in some way and to some extent, better off. Certainly, the humanistic nature of this concept of work makes it mandatory that gifted and talented persons be included among the intended recipients of a total career education effort.

As we were working on the book, certain problems in the delivery of effective career education to gifted and talented became clear. Some of these have become even more clear to me since the book was published. It is my purpose here to comment specifically on four broad problems, each of which entails a number of sub-problems. By sharing them with you here, I hope that the prime result will be our joint concentration on finding solutions to each, not simply commenting on its presence or absence.

Career Decision Making for Gifted and Talented Persons

Three of the special challenges present in providing effective career education for gifted and talented persons are in the arena of career decision making. One of these is centered around special difficulties involved in emphasizing education, as preparation for work, with highly intellectually gifted persons. This emphasis, as you know, underlies much of the operational efforts of career education. We have repeatedly said that the purpose of education cannot be simply education - that persons do not go to school simply so that they can go on to still more school. Rather, we have tried to emphasize that education must be regarded as preparation for something - for making a living, for appreciating life, for enjoying self-fulfillment in life, for good citizenship, for good physical and mental health, for anything else that could be said to represent a basic aim of American education.

In short, we have encouraged students to think beyond schooling and to consider what they plan to do with their schooling after they have first left the domain of formal education. For some intellectually gifted persons, this challenge has understandably met with little appeal. That is, such persons often find the atmosphere of academia quite congenial with their interests and preferred lifestyles. After all, they know they can not only succeed, but also excel if their competition is limited to a purely academic environment. Most of them are also aware of the fact that, were they to leave the academic "nest" for the world of paid employment, their chances of remaining at the top of whatever competitive "pile" they find themselves in will be diminished. That is, they know that, in the world of paid employment, factors other than pure intellectual and academic aptitude play a major role in determining what is known as "success." Some have understandably reasoned that they prefer to stay in the academic environment where they can always be assured of a position of excellence. Thus, when they hear career education urge them to prepare themselves for the world of paid employment, they sometimes find themselves less than enthusiastic about the prospects. In my opinion, this, in no way, makes our emphasis on education, as preparation for work, any less important for gifted and talented persons. It simply means that this emphasis may meet with more initial resistance.

A second career decision-making problem faced by the intellectually gifted, in particular, is their multipotentiality. Such persons are apt to be interested in a wide variety of areas and to find that they excell in almost everything they try. When, as in typical career decision making exercises, we attempt to help persons narrow their consideration of possible

occupations through discovering those in which they lack interest or aptitude - or both, we often find that very little narrowing occurs for many intellectually gifted persons. Some, especially if they discover this during that wonderful "age of absolutism" known as "adolescence," must surely wonder why they have difficulty narrowing their career choices. To point out, as we must, that such persons can probably find equally productive and satisfying lifestyles in a variety of occupational pursuits, does not do much to relieve the kinds of anxieties some such persons find themselves enduring.

A third problem for the intellectually gifted is that encountered when the process of career decision making places heavy emphasis on the current nature of the world of paid employment. The current and expected continuing rapidity of occupational change found in our society makes it generally inadvisable to concentrate much attention on the specific nature of the world of paid employment during the career awareness stage of career education typically carried out in elementary schools. However, when students reach the senior high school level, typical career education efforts carry a substantial concentration of effort on accumulation of this kind of knowledge. In the case of the highly intellectually gifted person, such an emphasis may be questionable even at the senior high school level - especially for the gifted person who is also highly creative. That is, these are the very persons who, as adults, will contribute most to the continuing rapidity of occupational change. For many, it will not be so much a matter of "discovering" occupations as it will a matter of "inventing" new occupations that never before existed. When this combination of giftedness and creativity is apparent in a given student, problems of appropriate

directions for assistance in career decision making become very great indeed.

The Development of Talent

If we move from consideration of the intellectually gifted person to the broader domain of the talented, a whole host of other problems emerge. One such problem, for example, is found for persons possessing talents which, if they are to fully mature, must begin having concentrated attention at a very early age. A prime example is the person who has the potential to become a talented violinist. There seems to be an abundence of evidence to indicate that this talent is one that should be nurtered beginning in the very early years if it is to be fully developed. We have all seen the results of this emphasis expressed by the various sizes of violins available for use by little children that gradually become larger as the child develops physical maturity. The fact that this does not appear to be a matter of serious concern for other talents - for example, among those who will be talented in playing the clarinet - makes it no less a serious problem where it exists.

A second, and related, problem exists for talented persons who make concentrated efforts to develop their talents during their youth - namely, the risk that their full development, as human beings, may be diminished in other important respects. This, too, is a problem that defies any simple or universal solution. We know that it exists and that, for some highly talented persons, it may have adverse effects when career development is seen as more important than other aspects of human growth and development.

A third problem especially important for career education lies in the definition of "talent." I was, in one sense, relieved to discover that there exists no apparent consensus even among those who have devoted their professional lives to the study of gifted and talented persons when problems of definition are raised. Some seem intent on making clear distinctions between the terms "gifted" and "talented" while others seem to regard the two as synonymous in meaning. I have discovered that some seem to limit their operational definition of "talent" to the arts and humanities area while others seem intent on talking about talents in the psychomotor and affective areas as well as those existing among artists, musicians, and actors. My own personal view is one that holds it desirable to broaden the definition of "talent" just as broadly as possible while, at the same time, restricting the definition of "gifted" primarily to those with exceptionally high levels of academic aptitude. I suspect this may be more due to my ignorance than to my insights into the matter. At the same time, in attempting to conceptualize career education, it has seemed desirable to me to consider the possibility that "talented" auto mechanics, machinists, electricians, and barbers may very well exist along with "talented" artists, musicians, and actors. That is, I do not find it personally comfortable to limit a view of what is "talented" to occupations that typically are classified as being "professional" in nature.

Work Experience for Gifted and Talented Persons

Career education has, from its inception, placed a strong emphasis on combining a "learning-to-do" with a "doing-to-learn" emphasis primarily

through entering into collaborative rleationships between the formal educational system, the business-labor-industry-professional-government community, and the home and family structure. We have asked that, as part of the career exploration phase of career development, observational, work experience, and word-study opportunities be provided for students at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Again, we find an aspect of career education that poses a special set of challenges with respect to gifted and talented persons.

Traditionally, American secondary education has thought of both "work experience" and "work-study" as special programs largely reserved for vocational education students. If, as career education proposes, education - as preparation for work - is to become a major goal of ALL who teach and of ALL who learn, both work experience and work-study must be thought of as general educational methodologies, not as specific kinds of educational programs. The skills and knowledges accumulated over the years by vocational education personnel assigned such functions must be shared with the total faculty - or, at the very least, be made available to the entire student body. This has, to some extent, already begun for gifted and talented students in certain parts of the country under a variety of arrangements. For example, in one Maryland school with whom I have worked (Winston Churchill), this responsibility has been assumed by the academic faculty while, in another Maryland school, the work-study specialist in vocational education has added the gifted and talented to the students served by his staff (Townson High School). In most schools, however, we have yet to see this problem directly attacked, let alone solved.

A second problem, especially for highly talented students, is one of finding talented persons in the community with whom they could acquire work experience. In the case of intellectually gifted students, it is obviously not difficult to place students with lawyers, M.D.s, engineers, etc for purposes of exploring possible occupational choices. It may be quite a different matter in the case of the talented prospective painter living in a small town in rural America. In some large urban areas, this problem has been solved by bringing talented persons from the community into the school system to assist in talent development of outstanding students. The New Orleans Center for the Cultural Arts in Career Education, under the direction of Ms. Shirley Trusty, is a good example.

The Freedom to Choose

Of all the operational problems to be faced in making career education for gifted and talented persons an operational reality, none is more serious or more crucial than that concerned with protecting individual freedom of choice. Here, we come face to face with several of the bedrock concepts of career education that must be made clear to those charged with responsibility for helping gifted and talented persons.

One crucial problem is found when one considers the apparently prevailing cultural mores that holds intellectually gifted persons as destined for college attendance. It is almost as though society has "sentenced" such persons to going to college, no matter what the interests or desires of the individual may be. Career education holds that no student should be sentenced to going to college because her or his measured I.Q. reaches a particular level. Rather, we have contended that freedom to attend

college or to select other post high school opportunities should be made fully available to all students - including the intellectually gifted. It may well be that, on occasion, we may find such a student whose prime occupational interest lies in becoming an auto mechanic. Career education has contended that such a student has every right to exercise this option and that, furthermore, our society would not really suffer greatly if she or he were to do so.

A related problem has to do with the apparent societal mores that holds gifted and talented persons have a responsibility to develop their gifts and talents to the fullest possible extent. While career education advocates plead that such students should know and be fully aware of opportunities for talent development, we plead equally strongly that the presence of such opportunities should be viewed as a right of the individual, not as a responsibility forced on the student by society.

Third, many seem to be operating under an assumption that gifted and talented persons should use their gifts and talents in the world of paid employment. Career education advocates make no such pretenses. On the contrary, we feel that there will be some, and perhaps many, gifted and talented persons whose system of personal values center around lifestyles that do not attach great significance to the world of paid employment nor to the economic returns to be reaped from that world. There are many gifted and talented persons who may prefer to labor (not work) in the world of paid employment in a rather menial job in order to have the kind of lifestyle that will allow them to gain the personal meaningfulness of true work through using their gifts and talents as part of

their productive use of leisure time. Again, we feel strongly that students have, and should be allowed to exercise, this right. It is not at all inconceivable that one could encounter a highly talented musician, for example, who chooses to produce music only in the solitude of his or her own home. If such a person chooses not to share such a talent with any other person, this, in no way, means that the talent has not been used in work - nor that the talent has been wasted. While we certainly do hope that work will become a meaningful part of the total lifestyle of all individuals, we do not expect that all will choose to find work only in the world of paid employment.

Concluding Remarks

In this presentation, I have tried to outline special problems facing those of us concerned with providing effective career education to gifted and talented persons. It should surprise no one that special problems are present. It is my hope that these problems have been presented here in a positive fashion - i.e., in a fashion that makes it clear that each is certainly capable of resolution and/or solution. It was hopefully no accident that the recently-enacted Special Projects Act provided sequential sections for career education, for gifted and talented, for women's equity, for community schools, for consumer education, and for arts and humanities. I like to think that all of these can and should be blended into a composite pattern of change in our American system of education. If this is to come about, it will be essential that those concerned with each area share with each other and work together in the interest of the students we all seek to serve.

In my opinion, a career education program is incomplete indeed if it does not provide a clear emphasis on and concern for gifted and talented persons. Similarly, it would seem to me that an emphasis on the gifted and talented would be equally incomplete if it did not include a concern for and involvement in career education. I hope it seems that way to you.

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